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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/209. It provides a status report on the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan.

* A/72/150.



I. Introduction

1. In support of the efforts of Kazakhstan to recover from the devastating consequences of nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the General Assembly adopted eight resolutions between 1997 and 2014 (resolutions 52/169 M, 53/1 H, 55/44, 57/101, 60/216, 63/279, 66/193 and 69/209), calling on donor States and international development organizations to support the efforts of the country in improving the social, economic and environmental situation in the Semipalatinsk region.¹
2. In its latest resolution, 69/209, the General Assembly urged the international community to assist Kazakhstan in formulating and implementing special programmes and projects for the treatment and care of the affected population and in its efforts to ensure economic growth and sustainable development in the Semipalatinsk region. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, under the item entitled "Sustainable development", on progress made in the implementation of the resolution.
3. To that end, the present report summarizes the progress made from 2014 to 2016 in the implementation of resolution 69/209 in the Semipalatinsk region by the Government of Kazakhstan, the United Nations and the international community.
4. The purpose of the present report is to outline the actions taken and progress made by the Government of Kazakhstan, United Nations agencies and the international community in addressing the social, economic and ecological challenges in the rehabilitation and development of the Semipalatinsk region.

II. Context

5. In 1989, after 40 years of atmospheric and underground nuclear explosions, all testing ceased at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the primary testing ground of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The test site, often referred to as the Polygon, witnessed 456 nuclear explosions that released energy equivalent to approximately 2,500 Hiroshima atomic bombs. In addition, 175 chemical-substance detonations were conducted in the tunnels of the Polygon in the period from 1961 to 1989. The Polygon is the only test site in the world where the residential areas in the proximity of the nuclear explosions were not relocated away from the radiation fallout territories.
6. In 1989, the first Soviet anti-nuclear movement was formed as a reaction to the devastating effects of the nuclear tests in Semipalatinsk. The movement, known as Nevada-Semipalatinsk, gained vast support from all layers of society. On 29 August 1991, the nuclear test site was officially closed.
7. On 16 December 1991, Kazakhstan declared its independence while concurrently embarking on the road to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Throughout the years of its independence, the leadership and the people of the country have gained significant international recognition for their remarkable commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world.
8. In 2014, reiterating the nation's firm commitment to nuclear security, the Government of Kazakhstan adopted a new foreign policy concept, which states that Kazakhstan "puts all efforts to achieving a world order free of nuclear weapons and

¹ The Semipalatinsk region refers to the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site located in the East Kazakhstan region. In 2007, the town of Semipalatinsk was renamed Semey.

other weapons of mass destruction; participates in development of multilateral mechanisms for a comprehensive ban and destruction of such weapons, as well as in creation of zones free of nuclear weapons”.

9. In 2014, Kazakhstan marked the twentieth anniversary of its accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and used various international platforms to promote the universalization of the Treaty. From 2014 to 2016, representatives of the Government of Kazakhstan and the ATOM Project (Abolish Testing. Our Mission)² showed their strong commitment to this cause by petitioning the nations of the world to make stronger efforts towards global nuclear non-proliferation and to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Throughout the period, the Government of Kazakhstan and civil society organized numerous international events with the aim of galvanizing global public opinion against nuclear-weapon testing and nuclear weapons at large. By the end of 2016, the ATOM Project's online petition for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty had been signed by more than 300,000 people worldwide.

10. In 2014, at the third Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague, the delegation of Kazakhstan distributed a new edition of the brochure “Building a nuclear safe world: the Kazakhstan way”, which seeks to highlight the nation's enduring work to achieve nuclear security and a ban on nuclear testing and to rid the world of nuclear weapons. In 2015, Astana hosted a major international seminar on the theme “Reducing global security threats: lessons from Kazakhstan”. The seminar focused on the history of the Cooperative Threat Reduction programme, better known as the Nunn-Lugar programme, and provided a platform for discussing progress and accumulating lessons learned from international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation processes.

11. In 2015, as an act of solidarity with the victims of nuclear disasters, Kazakhstan allocated 1 million euros to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund, provided more than \$1 million in total voluntary contributions to the Nuclear Security Fund of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and allocated an additional \$325,000 to the IAEA Peaceful Uses Initiative.

12. In 2016, Astana hosted an international conference on building a nuclear-weapon-free world, with the aim of strengthening international political commitments to prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons. The conference also established the Nazarbayev Prize for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World and Global Security, an international prize in recognition of contributions to global nuclear disarmament by world leaders and activists. The first recipient of the award was King Abdullah II of Jordan. The event was accompanied by nationwide educational and memorial activities dedicated to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the closing of the Semipalatinsk test site, which is also the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

13. From 2014 to 2016, Kazakhstan continued to implement national strategies and programmes for the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region and received international assistance for the implementation of specific national programmes in the region.

² Established by the Nazarbayev Centre in 2012, the ATOM Project is an international campaign and a multifunctional research and educational public institution. The primary goal of the campaign is to build international support for the abolishment of nuclear testing. It also aims to achieve the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty through online petitions and other methods.

III. Policy framework and Government programmes of assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

14. The Government of Kazakhstan relies on a number of national programmes and strategies, as well as targeted initiatives in the East Kazakhstan region, for assisting the Semipalatinsk region.

15. The Kazakhstan-2030 strategy outlines a long-term plan with the aim of transforming the country into one of the safest, most stable and ecologically sustainable States in the world, including a dynamically developing economy. The strategy prioritizes economic growth based on an open-market economy with a high level of foreign investments in the health, education and well-being of citizens and the development of infrastructure. The implementation of the strategy has been under way throughout the country, including in Semipalatinsk.

16. In 2016, the opening of a bridge across the Irtysh River in the Pavlodar region is an example of how the Kazakhstan-2030 strategy is being implemented in practice. The bridge is part of a major road-construction project that will connect Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation. Passing through the regions affected by nuclear testing, the project has already created more than 3,000 new jobs and, through improved connectivity of the East Kazakhstan region, is expected to have positive economic effects on the region at large.

17. The State programme of forced industrial and innovative development seeks to establish stable and well-balanced economic growth by diversifying and improving economic competitiveness. The nationwide programme has had visible effects on the Semipalatinsk region. The official statistical data for the period from 2014 to 2016 indicates that the region has been benefiting from the programme in several economic sectors. As an example, the Semipalatinsk region has witnessed steady growth of industrial and agricultural outputs, as well as a more significant, 36 per cent increase in production in the extraction industry.

18. The State health-care development programme and cancer care development plan provide strategic guidance and financial support for building the capacity of health-care professionals and for the establishment of regional radiation oncology centres in Astana, Almaty, Semey, Aktobe and Karaganda. The implementation of those plans is expected to improve cancer care, reduce cancer mortalities and improve the quality of life of citizens in the Semipalatinsk and other regions of the country.

19. The State programme for ensuring radiation safety at the adjacent territories of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site has been implemented by the National Nuclear Centre in the territories affected by radiation. Under the framework of the programme, territories of the nuclear test site are being examined and analysed for radiation and are assessed for their safety for the population and their suitability for economic exploitation.

20. The main official mechanism providing social care, medical support and financial benefits to the people affected by the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site is the law of 1992 on the social protection of citizens affected by nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk nuclear test Polygon.

21. A five-year joint programme between the Government of Kazakhstan and United Nations agencies concluded in 2016. Building on the strategic development plan of Kazakhstan for 2020 and other national strategic documents, the programme sought to enhance national capacities to address sectoral challenges in the areas of health, economic development, social protection and good governance.

22. In recent years, the drop in oil prices has caused a steep depreciation of the tenge, the currency of Kazakhstan, an increase in the inflation rate and a reduction of the purchasing power of the population. Increasing prices, declining real wages and lower employment opportunities have had a negative effect on the economy, most notably on low-income households and vulnerable layers of population. The country is slowly recovering from those economic shocks, however, and is demonstrating gradual socioeconomic progress in many sectors.

23. Kazakhstan made good progress in implementing the Millennium Development Goals and is well positioned to champion the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Senate of the Parliament adopted a statement reaffirming the country's commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and to "leaving no one behind". The Government, with assistance from the United Nations country team, is working to map the Sustainable Development Goals against the national policy documents and tailor them to the national development context.

A. Health care

24. In 2015, an emergency hospital with the capacity to treat 325 patients and handle 500 visits per day opened in Semey. The hospital, which was built under the Government's "100 schools, 100 hospitals" programme, is expected to further reduce maternal and infant mortality in the region, as well as to provide oncology services and treatment for cardiovascular morbidity.

25. In addition, a family outpatient clinic opened in Pirechnoe village in the East Kazakhstan region. The clinic, which hosts 16 doctors and nurses, will provide health-care services to the residents of Pirechnoe, Muzdybay and Zharkyn villages. The clinic was financed from the budget of the State health-care development programme, which is aimed at improving the social and demographic development of the country.

26. In 2014, the Government of Kazakhstan adopted a plan for special measures to improve the social protection of citizens affected by nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region. One of the measures entailed retrospective and prospective analysis of the medical and radioecological impact of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site on the population of the surrounding areas. The research, which was conducted from 2014 to 2016, produced specific recommendations for enhancing social and medical protection mechanisms for those groups most at risk of being affected by radiation. Among the recommendations were that children born of radiation-affected parents should be included in the risk group that is entitled to State support and that the duration and proportion of medical support should be evaluated individually and be based on the amount and effect of radiation to which each person was subjected. In addition, a list of possible health complications was produced as a point of reference for assessing the effects of radiation on second and third generations of people, with the aim of improving the provision of social services to the children and grandchildren of those who lived or live in the Semipalatinsk region.

B. Economic development

Transferring lands at the former Semipalatinsk test site for economic use

27. As part of the activities to secure the safety of the former Semipalatinsk test site, the National Nuclear Centre continued its integrated ecological examination of the south and south-eastern parts of the site from 2014 to 2016. The study covered

an area of 3,150 km², which is 650 km² more than during the previous reporting period. In 2016, an examination was initiated for an additional 1,200 km² of the test site not covered by past assessments. According to the results of those studies, the examined lands did not contain harmful traces of radiation and the entire 3,150-km² territory was recommended for full economic exploitation.

C. Environment

Remediating polluted sites

28. With a view to alleviating the effects of radiation at the nuclear test site, remediation (restoration) activities were carried out at sites polluted by radiation from 2014 to 2016. Remediation works were conducted over an area of 4.05 km² at the Opytnoe Pole platform site, where, as a result of the cleaning and treatment of radionuclide-contaminated soils, a significant decrease in surface radiation was achieved. By preventing the wind from spreading radioactive soil any further, the remediation is expected to have a positive effect on the ecology of the region.

29. Under the auspices of the State programme for ensuring radiation safety at the adjacent territories of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, monitoring of the local environment (water, air and flora) was conducted over a territory of 340 km² in and around residential areas in Beskaragay and Kanonerka in Beskaragay district, East Kazakhstan region. According to the findings, most of the territories did not exceed the standard limit of radiation and no harm was posed to local residents. With the exception of isolated cases of surface contamination, most of the land has been deemed safe for economic and agricultural use.

D. Education

30. In 2016, to commemorate the closing of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, the Government of Kazakhstan and local activists conducted country-wide seminars and awareness-raising events related to global nuclear threats. The activities also sought to improve public knowledge of the devastating effects of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. One such activity, organized in Karaganda, was dedicated to the effects of the Semipalatinsk test site and the achievements of Kazakhstan in the sphere of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The main target audience of the forum were young people from the 17 different universities that participated in the event online.

31. From 2014 to 2016, in order to improve the environmental awareness of young people in the East Kazakhstan region, the Children's Biological Centre of Semey, in collaboration with local preschools, elementary schools and other educational institutions, organized annual ecological summer camps and several recreational and educational activities for children of the region. The centre has won multiple awards and is recognized for its commitments to environmental safety and education.

32. In 2016, the Office of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights was established by an order of the President. Fifteen dialogue platforms were created and work on a permanent basis to support the Government in fulfilling its child rights obligations and address the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2015. At the national conference on the theme "Child-friendly Kazakhstan" in November 2016, national and international experts gathered to share best practices in the child rights agenda and plan for the future. At the dialogue platform on the theme "Children and the environment", experts from Parliament, ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gathered to develop a number of recommendations, including on addressing the issues of children living in the Semey area, for stakeholders to consider.

IV. United Nations and international assistance to the Semipalatinsk region

United Nations joint programme

33. In 2016, a five-year joint programme between the Government of Kazakhstan and four United Nations agencies, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Volunteers, concluded with noteworthy results for the development of the East Kazakhstan region and the well-being of the vulnerable people of the regions affected by the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The programme, entitled "Raising competitiveness of the region through innovative approaches to regional planning and social services", had a total budget of \$11,651,365, of which the Government contributed \$9,816,365.

34. The programme built the capacities of local executive and legislative bodies for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of regional programmes, while promoting better protection of the rights and interests of local residents by Government institutions. The programme improved access to social and economic services for vulnerable groups in Semey, Kurchatov, Ust-Kamenogorsk and other areas affected by nuclear testing in the East Kazakhstan region and empowered regional communities to actively participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local programmes.

35. Although it is too early to assess several results of the programmatic activities and continuous monitoring thereof is required, some noteworthy results and achievements had been identified by the end of the programme, as outlined below.

36. The central authorities of Kazakhstan recognize that the positive achievements of the East Kazakhstan region in developing and improving local self-governance mechanisms can serve as a model for replication in other regions of the country. The experience of the region was actively adopted during the preparation of the law on public councils, which incorporated methods and positive examples in public administration, strategic planning, monitoring, budgeting and implementation of State programmes in the region. In 2015, the law was signed into effect by the President as part of the ongoing institutional reforms in the country. In 2016, according to official statistics and development indicators, the Akimat (Office of the Regional Governor) of the East Kazakhstan region continued to be one of the better performing regional self-governance offices in the country, while in 2012 it came last in the country-wide assessment.

37. In collaboration with local NGOs and volunteers, the programme provided financial grants to social projects, increased the capacities of health and social workers, teachers and psychologists, improved the awareness of the population of social and economic opportunities and established new networks for regional peer support and information-sharing. As a result, vulnerable groups from Semey, Kurchatov, Ust-Kamenogorsk and the districts affected by nuclear testing in the East Kazakhstan region gained improved access to social and economic services in the region.

38. Opportunities for establishing and developing business activities among existing and aspiring entrepreneurs were improved through a series of capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives and the provision of financial and technological support to male and female entrepreneurs in the East Kazakhstan region.

39. The mother and child health-care centre in Ust-Kamenogorsk was transformed into a multifaceted centre, providing high-quality medical assistance and early

detection of developmental delays and becoming a resource and methodological centre on effective perinatal care for other maternity and children's hospitals in the East Kazakhstan region. Through the introduction of international methods of assessment and specialized training, the level of knowledge and skills of health professionals in providing services to children and mothers has increased and the quality of the nursing system for pregnant women and mothers with newborn children has improved. Those developments eventually contributed to a gradual decline in the infant mortality rate in the region. When the programme was in effect, the East Kazakhstan region witnessed a 50 per cent decline in the infant mortality rate, in contrast to 2010 when it was the region with the second highest rate, with 20 deaths per 1,000 live births. In addition, the maternal mortality rate decreased from 21.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to only 13.4 in 2015.

40. All social workers and psychologists in primary health-care centres in Semey and the staff of an infant home received methodological capacity-building training for identifying and dealing with families at risk of abandoning a child. The working procedures developed by the programme were institutionalized and became part of the current statutory practice for the assessment and provision of assistance to such families. During the programme implementation period, more than 128 cases were identified and successfully handled by the local specialists, representing more than 50 per cent of the vulnerable families identified as being at risk of abandoning a child (360 families).

41. A pilot violence prevention programme in seven schools and three educational institutions in the East Kazakhstan region was implemented successfully. The programme offered school staff the knowledge and tools to identify and respond to incidents of school violence in a way that encourages behavioural change and accountability. The teachers, students and parents were provided with a guide to improve their understanding of their role in identifying and treating cases of violence among and against children. Following the achievements of the programme in the region, similar guides and actions were adopted in Kyzylorda and Mangystau regions, as well as in Almaty.

42. The programme supported local authorities by introducing new social work methods in justice systems and testing alternatives to imprisonment for young people. As a result, 144 adolescents in contact with the law, including witnesses and victims of crime, and 76 families were provided with access to sociopedagogical, psychological and legal services to foster their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. The newly established diversion centre in the town of Ust-Kamenogorsk became one of the first facilities in the country to provide rehabilitation, psychological and social services to children in conflict with the law. The experience has been shared with other regions of Kazakhstan, and similar centres were established in Zyryanovsk in the East Kazakhstan region and in Kyzylorda and Mangystau regions.

43. With the aim of reducing juvenile reoffending, a youth-friendly and methodologically sound probation service was tested in the East Kazakhstan region. The programme extended its support to specialized juvenile courts and probation offices by equipping and opening youth-friendly rooms in compliance with international standards. The capacities of local juvenile judges, local authorities and NGO representatives were enhanced, the existing coordination and inter-agency cooperation mechanism on child rights and justice for children was further strengthened and alternative probation practices for children in conflict with the law were introduced. All those initiatives contributed to a decrease of more than 50 per cent in the number of crimes committed by young people in the East Kazakhstan region.

44. Children living in disaster-prone areas of the East Kazakhstan region participated in the disaster risk reduction programme supported by United Nations agencies and co-funded by the European Community Humanitarian Office and the Government of Kazakhstan. Teachers, caregivers and children improved their knowledge of and skills in relation to safe behaviour before, during and after disasters. In disasters, such as the earthquakes and flooding in April 2015, children were better prepared and were able to help their relatives and friends to stay safe. Children and young people took part in a disaster risk analysis with a focus on children's vulnerabilities that was tested in Zyryanovsk, East Kazakhstan region, in 2015. Experiences and lessons learned have been shared at the national and regional levels.

45. Semey and Ust-Kamenogorsk cities, East Kazakhstan region, have joined the international Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, the aim of which is to fulfil child rights at the local governance level. The capacities of local education, health, welfare, economic and budget planning, infrastructure authorities, NGOs and universities were raised in terms of planning and budgeting for children, employing techniques to engage children in the lives of their cities and creating a child-friendly urban environment. As a result, children became active participants in annual public hearings on urban development, at which they presented their views and recommendations to the local authorities.

46. International and national experts of United Nations agencies assessed the structural safety of eight schools in the East Kazakhstan region. Outcomes and recommendations for strengthening safety that were developed and discussed with the local and national education, construction and emergency authorities will contribute to national high-level advocacy on ensuring a safe environment for children.

47. In order to ensure an optimum-quality control structure and improved management systems for the delivery of health-care services, the programme introduced the International Organization for Standardization 9001:2008 standard to the mother and child centre in Oskemen and the perinatal centre in Semey. The two health-care facilities were certified by an external certification body. In addition, 20 per cent of the total number of primary health-care institutions in the East Kazakhstan region received training in the provision of family planning, antenatal care and other sexual and reproductive health services.

International Atomic Energy Agency

48. In 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Government of Kazakhstan signed an agreement for the creation of a low-enriched uranium bank in the East Kazakhstan region. The bank is owned and controlled by IAEA but is operated by the Government of Kazakhstan under its own legislation and in accordance with IAEA safety standards and security guidance. The bank is expected to become operational in the second half of 2017.

49. The bank will host a reserve of low-enriched uranium and act as a supplier of last resort for IAEA member States in the event that the supply of low-enriched uranium to a nuclear power plant is disrupted owing to exceptional circumstances and member States are unable to secure low-enriched uranium from the commercial market or by other means. The bank will be located on the premises of the Ulba metallurgical plant. The plant is a licensed nuclear site with commercial-scale operations and the complete infrastructure to safely and securely store, transport and process low-enriched uranium. The bank is financed fully by volunteer contributions, including from Kuwait, Norway, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the European Union and the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

50. With financial support from the European Union, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has sought to improve living standards and to protect the dignity of labour migrants in Kazakhstan by providing consultations on the legal, social and health concerns of individuals. From 2014 to 2016, more than 1,000 labour migrants received information on a healthy lifestyle and training in first aid delivery. More than 80 foreign labour migrants in Kazakhstan were able to restore lost documentation and legalize their labour status in the country. In addition, more than 100 labour migrants were treated for health concerns in the medical facilities of Semey.

51. During the same period, the Red Crescent Hospital in Semey provided medical services to vulnerable groups with low economic status, single-parent families, older persons and disabled persons. Treatment was provided to individuals with oncological diseases, in the terminal stages of AIDS and with cardiovascular sicknesses and a number of other disabling illnesses. During the three-year period, 1,085 patients were treated and a total of 40,142 bed days were reported at the hospital. In addition, 105 patients who needed additional treatment and rehabilitation were directed to other specialist health-care institutions of the East Kazakhstan region.

52. Supported by the Japanese Red Cross Society, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement offered care and support to 75 individuals with multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis through its health programme for preventive maintenance of multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis. Affected individuals received medical and sustenance provisions and home-care visits and benefited from the establishment of peer support groups.

Government of Japan

53. From 2014 to 2016, the Government of Japan allocated \$238,938 in support of the rehabilitation of social infrastructure in the town of Semey. The funding for activities was allocated from the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects scheme, a funding tool supporting community-level socioeconomic development projects initiated by civil society organizations to address people's basic human needs. During the reporting period, the scheme allocated grants for three separate school rehabilitation projects that successfully established safe and comfortable learning environments for three middle schools in Semey.

Government of Sweden

54. The Embassy of Sweden in Kazakhstan organized a number of exhibitions of the Swedish artist, Tove Krabo, in Kazakhstan on the topic of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The exhibitions presented art works devoted to nuclear tests and their devastating consequences for humankind and the environment. Most of the works were created specifically for the exhibitions.

55. The first exhibition opened on 2 November 2016 in the Museum of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana. The following exhibitions were held in Semey, Petropavlovsk and Almaty. Following its tour in Kazakhstan, the awareness-raising project will continue in Sweden.

European Union

56. The activities funded by the European Union, which were regulated by several cooperation agreements between the European Union and Kazakhstan in the field of the peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy, were focused mainly on energy

cooperation and research, including in the areas of nuclear safety and nuclear fusion. In addition to allocating financial contributions in the amount of €25 million for the creation of the IAEA low-enriched uranium bank in the East Kazakhstan region, the European Union has provided funding for nuclear safety, security and radiation protection research and capacity-building.

57. From 2013 to 2016, Kazakhstan benefited from the European-Union-funded prospective cohort study of residents living near the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site — feasibility assessment (SEMI-NUC project). The project, which received €945,000 in funding from the research and training programme of the European Atomic Energy Community, was coordinated by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. The goal of the project was to assess the feasibility of establishing a long-term, prospective cohort to study the health effects of the low-to-moderate radiation exposures that resulted from the testing of nuclear weapons at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The project brought together scientists from Europe, Japan and Kazakhstan.

58. The results of the project are expected to reduce the duplication of efforts and resources for local and international studies of the health risks associated with low-to-moderate chronic doses of radiation. Other populations exposed to radiation could benefit from the studies of the Semipalatinsk region, which would result in a better understanding of the risks associated with low-to-moderate chronic doses of radiation. The project results may also serve as a valuable reference to make decisions on designing long-term medical follow-up programmes for affected populations.

V. Priorities for future action

59. The commitment of the Government of Kazakhstan to rehabilitate the lingering consequences of the nuclear test site legacy, coupled with continuous donor assistance and civil society's support, has produced noteworthy results and has laid a foundation for addressing some of the most pressing challenges in the Semipalatinsk region. At the same time, fostering the affected region's long-term development will require the continuous effort of the Government and international community. In line with the State programme for ensuring radiation safety at the adjacent territories of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and the outcomes of the consultations between sectoral ministries and the Akimat of the East Kazakhstan region in preparation of the present report, and on the basis of the final evaluation of the United Nations joint programme finalized in 2015, the following priorities will require additional focus and coordinated action from the Government and the international community in the years to come:

(a) Intensifying the efforts to alleviate rural poverty and close the earned income gap between regions, including in the East Kazakhstan region, through the creation of decent jobs and income generation measures for vulnerable populations, such as repatriates (*oralmans*), disabled persons and young people;

(b) Improving educational policies and the quality of education at both the primary and secondary levels, with special attention to facilitating access to high-quality educational opportunities for children with disabilities and from socially disadvantaged families;

(c) Guaranteeing full gender equality in all spheres of social and civil activities, including ensuring the protection of women from violence, closing the gender pay gap and improving women's access to income-generating opportunities;

(d) Strengthening health-management systems and the primary health-care system, with a focus on mother and child health outcomes;

(e) Increasing the efficiency of planning and the use of State resources in socioeconomic programmes at the local level, fully implementing the law of 2017 on local self-governance and further scaling up community-led participatory initiatives on the basis of the results of the United Nations joint programme;

(f) Enhancing access to high-quality social and economic services for vulnerable groups, including women, older persons and children, particularly those with disabilities;

(g) Continuously monitoring the overall safety and resilience of the East Kazakhstan region, localizing the priority actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim of leaving no one behind, promoting a green economy and climate adaptation and mitigation actions, and monitoring the air quality in and around the industrial zones of Ust-Kamenogorsk;

(h) Enhancing coordination between local and central governments, civil society and the development community for the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and maintaining the results achieved through previous programmes in Semey.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

60. The Government of Kazakhstan and civil society have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to advocating the concept of a nuclear-free world and have highlighted the importance of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site as a symbol for the advancement of international awareness of the disastrous consequences of nuclear weapons. Concurrently, the Government, with the assistance of donors and the direct involvement of United Nations agencies, has carried out a considerable amount of work for the benefit of the Semipalatinsk region. National development strategies and programmes have been accompanied by a number of regional projects for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the region.

61. The joint efforts of the Government, local NGOs and the international community have produced significant results, improving the social, ecological and economic conditions of the people affected by the Semipalatinsk test site. To that end, the Secretary-General calls on the international community to further support the joint work of the Government and the United Nations by:

(a) Providing the technical, expert and financial contributions necessary for the implementation of national development programmes for the rehabilitation and development of the Semipalatinsk region;

(b) Promoting international awareness of the humanitarian and environmental devastation caused by the nuclear tests in Semipalatinsk, and reminding the global community of the ongoing challenges of the people affected by the test site;

(c) Strengthening coordination and information-sharing among various actors in the region to plan, implement and monitor inclusive regional socioeconomic programmes and services, with special attention to vulnerable groups in the region.

62. With the aim of supporting the efforts of the Government of Kazakhstan to increase the effectiveness of assistance to alleviate the tragic consequences of nuclear testing, the Secretary-General acknowledges the existing positive developments in the region and takes this opportunity to encourage the international community to intensify its contributions towards the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region.